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the eye

This Charming Man

FLORALS, SÉANCES, THE SMITHS: GET INSPIRED FOR SPRING

JANET WEISS ON SLEATER-KINNEY AND STEPHEN MALKMUS

WHY YOU SHOULD CARE ABOUT WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH

ROBERT BRINK INTERVIEWS LI YANG

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THIS CHARMING MAN 07

Leave the blustery days of winter behind with our annual spring fashion spread.

Styled by Shirley Chen

Photos by Joey Shemuel

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Wander around the *Spectator* office on any given evening, and you're likely to find that at least four or five intrepid young journalists (usually from the news staff—bless their professionalism) have their Firefox browsers open to nytimes.com. I'm not one of them.

Though, of course, I'm a fan of the *Times* in print, I can never bring myself to spend much time on their Web site. I have a nagging suspicion, and I'm embarrassed to admit this, that it's because I find the site overwhelming. The default *Times* page boasts what feels like literally all the world's available information at any given moment, lumped together right there demanding the reader's attention. I prefer the BBC's site—it's not an information overload, but it's still classy enough to bring up in a Lerner computer lab, and world news is handily broken down by continent.

I should confess, though: more often than not, I end up at cnn.com, and it's purely for the fluff pieces. I'm not sure I've ever read a serious article on a pressing issue on the CNN Web site, but last night I clicked the link for “Pesky buzzards gnaw holes in cars” as soon as I saw it. “Pet rat's artwork sells for more than \$3500”? I would never have known! Thanks, CNN!

There's something to that rat art, though. When I watched the video, I thought immediately of *My Kid Could Paint That*, a documentary that came out last year. It follows the story of Marla Olmstead, a 4-year-old whose paintings have been compared to Picasso's and have fetched over a quarter of a million dollars each. And then there's Yasmina Reza's 1999 play “*Art*” (don't doubt our copy editors, by the way—the quotation marks are part of the title), about an aesthete named Serge who buys a pure white canvas by a leading contemporary artist for an exorbitant sum, much to the chagrin of his friends. I cringe to bring up Duchamp in this context, but almost 100 years after *Fountain*, where do we draw the line for kitsch objects as art objects?

Of course, I figure that for every Marla Olmstead and every pet rat that fetches thousands at auction, there are thousands of hamster owners frantically trying to prod their pets to walk across a canvas just so, or parents forcing paintbrushes into their toddlers' uncoordinated hands. They're trying to capitalize on the human penchant for the Next Big Thing, desperately hoping someone will buy it without really having any idea how to make that happen.

It may be a truism to say that fashion is, by nature, predicated on the Next Big Thing—but it bears repeating. And when I realized that *The Eye* would have to run a fashion shoot at some point this semester if I was going to follow precedent, I felt a little out of my league. As someone working with only the most basic knowledge of style (as I write this, I'm wearing—gasp!—a J. Crew cardigan), I worried that any fashion photo set over which I had any influence to do would appear hopelessly amateurish. I'd be the dilettante trying to convince strangers my hamster's tracks were art, and nobody would buy it.

Thank goodness, then, that I had absolutely nothing to do with the creative vision for this photo shoot. And thank goodness that style editor Shirley Chen and brilliant photographer Joey Shemuel know so much about these things. The result of their hard work is a fun, fresh, sophisticated look at spring fashion, loosely inspired by something of which I can claim a little knowledge—a certain charming song from The Smiths' eponymous 1984 debut album.

Current-season Carlos Miele gowns running right alongside Morrissey and Marr's well-trod lyrics—it seems that the only consistent rule of the cutting-edge in any field is that it will forever draw from the classics, updating established industry standards for a new era. Maybe I should start reading the *Times'* Web site after all.

—Alexandria Symonds

The Village Voice

robert brink interviews li yang

INTERVIEW BY ROBERT BRINK

PHOTO COURTESY OF LI YANG

At 8:30 tonight, Chinese film director Li Yang's celebrated *Blind Mountain* will screen at the School of International and Public Affairs in Altschul Auditorium. For SIPA, *Blind Mountain*'s significance lies in its honest look at legal and human rights issues in China. For film students, the daring nature of the film will likely be cause for conversation. Richard Pena, professor in the department of film studies, notes that Yang is "one of the leading members of a vibrant new generation of Chinese filmmakers who are taking long, hard looks at the human cost of their nation's near-wondrous economic and social transformation. He's that rare engaged artist whose works are both politically daring and emotionally affecting." *Blind Mountain* opens at Film Forum on March 12 and runs until March 25. The advance screening at SIPA will be followed by a discussion with professors Andrew Nathan and Carole Vance.



Li Yang's latest film, *Blind Mountain*, dares to critique social change in China.

What calls you to a new project?

I'm always concerned about how social change influences the family dynamic. So my next project is still about the people living on the edge.

In *Blind Shaft*, you went to the mines to do first-hand research. Was there a similar process preparing for *Blind Mountain*?

I spent two months in the rural countryside to do the research. I grew up in bigger cities. It's not my particular life. So I needed to familiarize myself with everything.

What drew you out of the city?

Eighty percent of the population in China still lives in the village. The life of those people is richer than in the city. My film, the purpose of my film, is to focus and pay attention to people who are underprivileged.

I understand that you collaborated with non-actors as well as a trained actor in your lead role. What prompted this choice?

My film and my characters live on the edge of society. It's about peasants and jobless people. All these actors right now in China are too pretty, too clean. I'm telling a real story—I can't stand the fake acting. My non-actors—even though they don't know how to act—they know how to be real.

Do you have demographic information on where your films have been viewed in China? Have they been viewed in the country, or just in the city?

My domestic distribution plan was to go over the bigger cities first, then the secondary cities, and then the countryside. We haven't reached that yet. But of course pirated DVD goes faster than my distributor goes around the nation, so probably they will see the DVD version.

What is the impact of censors on filmmaking?

Censorship is one of the most difficult challenges. The censorship system in China is structured like this: first of all, before you start any production, you need to submit your script to the Film Bureau. After the script is proofed, you get your permit.

Because of the censorship, many of the private film investors in China hesitate to invest in films that focus on this kind of genre. So the result of censorship is that we don't have financiers for this particular kind of film.

So I used some of my money (most of my money), then borrowed money from friends, from relatives—my mom, my brother. The financial situation made it very hard to make a film like this to criticize political and social issues in China. But I think China needs this kind of film. We can't just do that type of commercial film.

In the United States, we don't face official censors directly, but we do have financial censorship, and there's the issue of audience demand and readiness. Do you have to grapple with that?

My film is not for the mass audience. I can't say everybody will love my film, but it's for a particular crowd. The ones who care about social and political issues are always the intellectuals, no matter which dynasty in society. That's a small number of the audience. The general population, they love comedies, mainstream Hollywood films.

When I did this film, I was prepared: my audience pull is going to be small. If one of a hundred of this population can see my film, that's a massive number already.

Back to script censorship and the bureau: were there many adjustments in getting the permit?

Yes, I changed my script a couple of times to get the shooting permit. The censorship depends on the particular official's mood, and at the moment, what kind of political atmosphere surrounds that particular office. It varies.

Do you rule certain things out—adjust your film in advance to deal with projected censor issues?

I wasn't ready for their comments. I couldn't imagine what comments they would give me. There isn't a set principle, so everything is plausible.

Were these cuts difficult to make?

Of course it's very difficult for me to make alterations, because the final print is what I really wanted

to express—but sometimes I sacrifice. It's a hard choice, but in order to get theatrical release in China, it's very important. I want my film to have an audience, even if it's a small group.

With the economic change, political restrictions have loosened up in China in recent years. The censorship is a lot better than the last decade—the situation is improving.

Actually, as everybody here knows, the MPAA is another kind of censorship, and also—as you mentioned—the financiers censor everything before they put in their money. The unfortunate monster is the one who has tons of money, but an illiterate mind. Often in China, when we try to finance a film, the investor will say, "Oh, this is how I want it. This is the girl I want." Many of those investors and distributors are doing things in the name of the audience. The various dictators will say, "Oh, the audience wants this and that. The audience doesn't want yours." But if my film is never in the theater in the first place, how can you imagine what the audience will want?

At least I have the final cut, right? Compared to the Hollywood director, I'm lucky.


Do particular filmmakers inspire you?

I went to school in Germany and spent 14 years in Germany. I'm strongly influenced by the European directors and European artists [Rainer Werner Fassbinder and [Michelangelo] Antonioni. I'm influenced by Italian neorealism. My current most favorite directors are the two brothers from Belgium who won Cannes [Luc and Jean-Pierre Dardenne].

Do you have a favorite Chinese film?

I like the Chinese films in the 1930s and '40s, such as *The Goddess*. In the 1940s, many of the Chinese films focused on social criticism. I particularly like those.

For the sort of spectator who enjoys your work: what Chinese films do you recommend?

Yellow Earth, *To Live*, *Farewell My Concubine*, *Pick-pocket*. It's from the fourth generation, right after the Cultural Revolution. Of course, and mine too. 

Green Peak

new trends in the columbia environmental movement

BY JENNIE ROSE HALPERIN

PHOTO BY MOLLY CROSSIN

HERE AT COLUMBIA, green is the new light blue.

The environmental movement has been steadily taking over the nation for quite some time, and Columbia students and administrators are also participating in this waste-wary wave.

Last semester, Ariel Zucker, CC '09, earned a \$500 grant to make campus composting a reality. She received the grant from Americans for Informed Democracy, a nonpartisan organization that seeks to form "globally conscious leaders" through programming and funding. Fifteen Columbia students are currently using worms to convert their waste instead of the other option—letting it rot in a landfill.

"For me, this is primarily an educational program. Most people have no idea how easy it is to compost, or why it's important," Zucker says.

The worms are put in bins filled with newspaper and water, a set-up that allows the worms to anaerobically respire and break down the refuse. Bacteria further decompose the waste, essentially converting it into dirt. By putting up to five pounds of compost in the bins per week, participants effectively convert their waste into food that will be used for their own plants and the trees around their homes. Though some students had trouble with the process at first, Zucker says "it's just been a matter of adding enough dry bedding and feeding the worms the right amount."

To supplement the project, the participating students are also making a short documentary on their localized composting.

"We hope that people will see [Columbia's worm] composting, hear about it, learn about it, and take it with them after graduation. After all, if you can do it in a NYC apartment, where can't you do it?" Zucker says.

The unique worm project is but one small aspect of the larger environmental movement at Columbia.

According to Jordan Selig, CC '09, despite the fact that there are many obstacles for the green movement, both faculty and students seem to want to "take action and responsibility."

The difficulty now remains in getting students to participate in the movement.

"Start snooping around, ask questions, use campus environmental issues for classes, and get involved with any group you can," says Acadia Roher, president of Green Umbrella, which is the overseeing student organization for most of the environmental groups on campus.

Getting involved at Columbia shouldn't be difficult, as there are a number of groups to choose from.

Aside from Green Umbrella, there is the EcoRep program, which is an initiative that pays students to tend to day-to-day environmental issues on campus such as energy and paper use and education. Another environmentally focused group is Students for Environmental Justice, whose campaign includes clever "Blow Me" T-shirts that promote the need for wind energy. Additionally, there is the Food Sustainability

Project, which runs the JJ's food co-op and other food-related projects, and EarthCo, an environmental organization that teaches environmental education to grade school children, among other programs.

Despite the plethora of campus environmental groups, there is a definite sense of cohesion among them.

"A lot of groups have liaisons that make sure that communication happens between groups. The Green Umbrella meets once a month to make sure everything happens. We all do publicity and generally support one another

in every way we can—we're all working toward the same goal," Roher says.

Though the environmental cause at Columbia is primarily a large on-campus activist movement hoping to enact certain changes in the way the school functions, participants believe they have learned during the process of their activist work.

Amanda Rook, BC '08 and Barnard EcoRep, says: "I've enjoyed doing campus sustainability work because it's made me revise my academic experience. I see the campus as a system and a business now. I see it more practically, as a financially functioning unit."

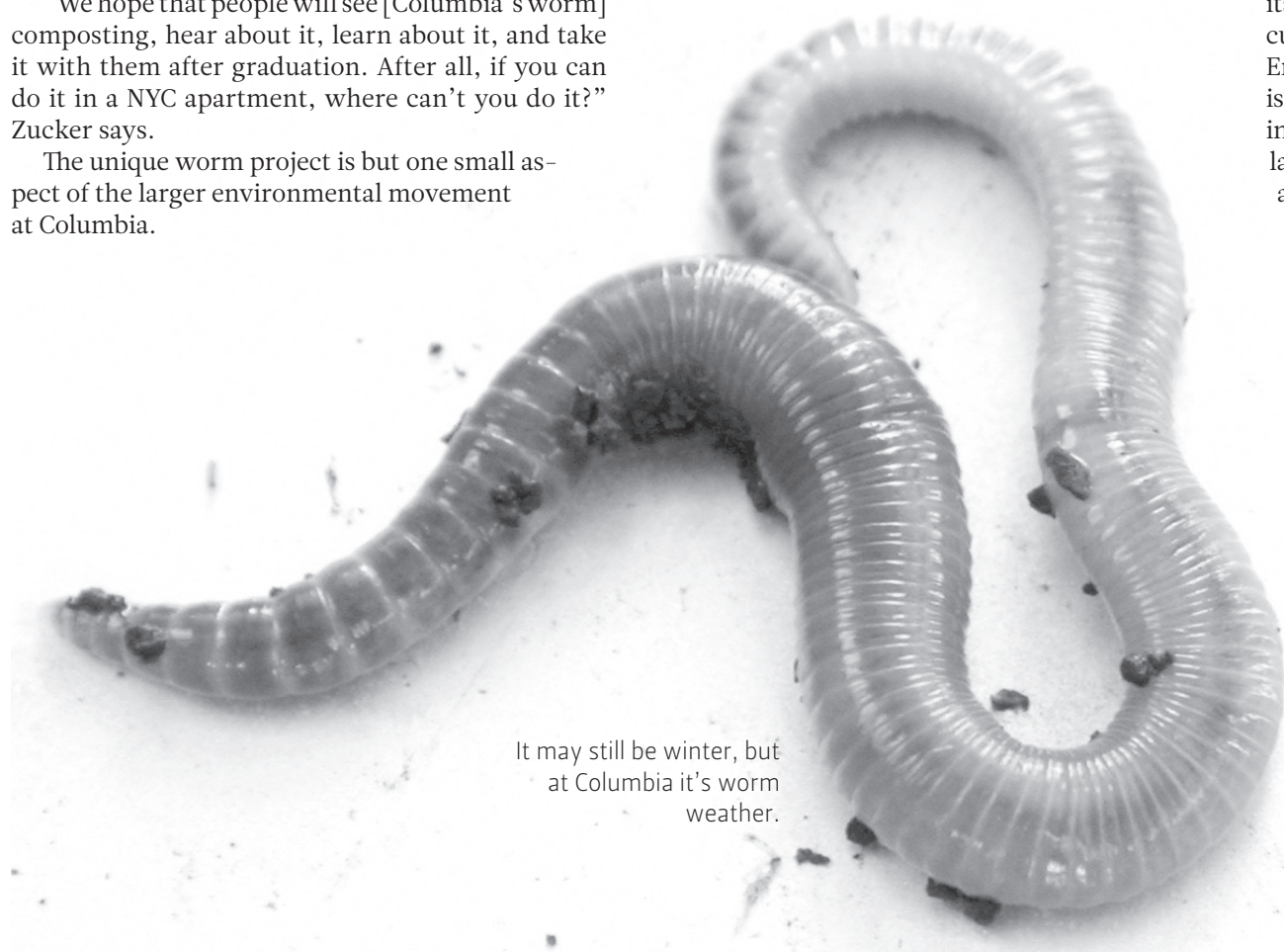
The Columbia administration made a big show of its so-called "green initiative" last year, handing out cute tote bags and hiring Nilda Mesa as the chair of Environmental Stewardship, but some green activists on campus still find the administration perplexing, particularly regarding what they perceive as a lack of publicity for the internal green changes the administration has made.

"I definitely think that Columbia should be publicizing all the great things they're doing—some of them are invisible to us, but extremely important to improving the infrastructure of the University," Roher says.

The results of the green student movement have been particularly impressive as well. Some of the changes it has produced are now largely taken for granted. For example, double-sided printing is a well-publicized option for all campus printers, recycling bins are conspicuous and readily available, and the EcoReps program is an integral part of the campus community.

So while some student movements tend to get ripe only to wither later, the greening of Columbia remains proudly at the peak of its prominence. With more students taking responsibility for their lives, for their campus, and for their planet, the green season appears to be permanent. \\\

"I see the campus as a system and a business now. I see it more practically, as a financially functioning unit."



It may still be winter, but at Columbia it's worm weather.

The March Mystique

putting a modern spin on women's history month

BY ASHLEY JAMES

PHOTO BY MOLLY CROSSIN

IT'S LADIES NIGHT. Continually for the next 25 days.

This past Saturday, March 1, was the official starting date of Women's History Month, a federally-recognized holiday in the United States. And while the inception of this female festivity falls on a weekend, the celebration did not truly get underway until Monday night at Columbia.

The evening before the Women's History Month committee's opening reception, co-chairs Beth Anne Macaluso, BC '09, and Ruhi Shamim, CC '09, were still scrambling to get the word out.

"We've been advertising, Facebooking. Our advisors got us on e-mail listservs. In the past years, the reception has been well attended, so we're excited," Shamim says, sitting at a table piled with fliers and notebooks all related to the month's planning.

Along with a committee of six Columbia and Barnard students, Shamim and Macaluso have been preparing for Women's History Month since the beginning of this year. In the past, committee leaders have struggled to organize in the two short months between the start of the semester and March 1.

"There was lots of brainstorming last semester, but everything got going in early January," Macaluso says.

This year, committee leaders are having an easier time publicizing because they say there is more campus awareness. This particular night, Shamim and Macaluso were finalizing plans for guest speakers, particularly for the closing reception. They were also busy taping fliers in Lerner in an attempt to ensure significant attendance for the evening.

"In the past, less attendance might have had to do with it being March, with midterms and spring break, and having to plan the event in such a short amount of time. But, in the past, there has not been as much campus awareness," Shamim says.

Shamim and Macaluso both applied to be on the Women's History Month committee after receiving e-mails from the College Activities Office at Barnard, and the Division of Student Affairs at Columbia, asking students to apply for the board.

"It's something that sparked my interest," Shamim says.

In particular, Shamim wanted to change the image of Women's History Month, updating it to better suit the needs of college students, a challenge that she believes she and her committee members have accomplished. She calls the events "something that young women can relate to," adding, "A lot of it is focused on contemporary women."

Both Shamim and Macaluso believe the common historical approach to the month is decidedly passé or at least not as relevant as it might have been in the past.

"That's what we get in high school... Susan B. Anthony," Shamim says.

Just how geared the month is to college students, particularly those at Columbia, is exemplified by the foundation the committee chose to donate their



Women's History Month festivities, like so many college celebrations, include a cappella music.

auction earnings to. Right Rides for Women's Safety is a program that offers women, transgendered people, and gender queer individuals free rides home on Saturdays from midnight to 3 a.m. in designated areas throughout the five boroughs.

"I think it appeals to young women in the city. It's in the best interest of Columbia and Barnard students," Shamim says.

The auction is the final event of the month's celebration. Women in Hip Hop, a talk featuring three female emcees—Eternia, Siobhan Carter, and Bambi—is another event that speaks to the more contemporary spin the committee is attempting to put on the month.

"They are successful in the hip-hop industry, and I think all these women have strong female identities despite the industry. They don't cater to the stereotypes," Macaluso says, referring to the notoriously misogynistic rap realm.

Another similarly themed event is the Women in

question," Shamim says.

While the committee members have formed a number of events on their own, the Women's History Month committee has also reached out to other groups for co-sponsorship of events. With Hillel and the Muslim Students Association, the committee is hosting Lisa Gossels, documentary filmmaker. Her newest documentary, *Imagining Peace*, is about six girls in the Middle East who discuss their views on how to bring peace to their homeland. It will be screened, and a discussion with Gossels will follow. The event has an added twist the planners are proud of—Gossels actually plans to use student feedback in the final editing process for *Imagining Peace*.

"The film is currently a work in progress. So, it's an amazing opportunity for students to give their opinions on the film," Shamim says.

But the events for the month are not all serious in nature. The committee has been determined to keep the scheduling varied. The follow-up to the month's opening reception was "Stitch and Bitch Study Break," where students enjoyed free food and were given the opportunity to get their knitting needles going.

"Initially we thought, 'Is that too girly?' But we are not apologizing for the reality of women's interests. We have to include those lighthearted things, too," Shamim says.

The main goal for both Shamim and Macaluso is to be as inclusive as possible with their planning, whether the event is focused on hip-hop music or home crafts.

"I really hope that Columbia students don't feel deterred. Just because this isn't an all-female college shouldn't take away from the fact that this is a nationally-acknowledged holiday. By no means are our events closed-off to male students. Diversity in audience is a priority," Shamim says.

IN PARTICULAR, SHAMIM WANTED TO CHANGE THE IMAGE OF WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH, UPDATING IT TO BETTER SUIT THE NEEDS OF COLLEGE STUDENTS, A CHALLENGE THAT SHE BELIEVES SHE AND HER COMMITTEE MEMBERS HAVE ACCOMPLISHED.

the Media panel, still in the planning stages.

"We are working on it now. Nothing is finalized. We hope to host influential women in the media who would talk about the portrayal of women in the media today," Macaluso says.

"Different magazines cater to certain types of women. What is it like to be part of an industry that caters to certain female types? That's the central

Hitting the Pavement

janet weiss' portland pride

BY LIANNA CARRIGAN

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE BEGGARS GROUP

JUNE 27, 2006 WAS A TRAGIC DAY in American rock 'n' roll. Sleater-Kinney, the girl-rock, riot-grrrl darling of Portland, Ore., announced that it would go on an indefinite hiatus. This news broke hearts, elicited tears, and left the indie-rock world bereft while the girls of Sleater-Kinney went on to sweet solo careers.

Janet Weiss, Sleater-Kinney's former drummer, speaks approvingly of the breakup, saying, "It allows me to play with other people ... I'm mostly about being in a band." She's been playing with bands for nearly 20 years, bringing her distinctive rhythms to such groups as Bright Eyes, Quasi (her project with ex-husband Sam Coomes), and Elliott Smith. Currently, she plays with Stephen Malkmus' band, the Jicks.

Malkmus also fronted Pavement (the ultimate suburban-American indie band), and his newest album with the Jicks, *Real Emotional Trash*, was released on March 4. Weiss jumps at the chance to talk about her bandmate's talents. "It's such an honor to play with someone so inventive ...," Weiss says. "You never know what he's going to come up with. It truly is exciting ... he's on the verge of something really cool all of the time."

True as this statement may be, Weiss is overly

modest, as her own talents have been keeping the beat steady for many records over the years. As a drummer, she says, "I don't think about anything except the music we're working on, and it's very personal," and Weiss' work is as innovative as the Jicks' new music. Rhythmically complex and complementary drumbeats are Weiss' specialty, and they are evident on every track of *Real Emotional Trash*.

"YOU KIND OF HUNG OUT WITH THE SAME PEOPLE IN YOUR TOWN, YOU PLAYED MUSIC WITH THE SAME PEOPLE ... AND YOU ENDED UP CRAFTING THIS THING, THIS SCENE."

Weiss was born in Hollywood, Calif., and remains a West Coast dweller, living in Portland since 1989. Her first band, The Furies, was part of the Portland music collaborative that came of age in the early 1990s—an "incredible scene, one of the best scenes of any scene," Weiss says. "There were a bunch of local bands, and they were all great ... truly what a scene is all about."

Music "scenes" are a thing of the past, with MySpace, pirated MP3s, and leaked albums spelling the demise of such great regional enclaves. "There are fewer of those regional scenes now because of computers," Weiss says. "Everyone sort of has access to everything. You don't just fester in your

town with your band for three years before you ever go on tour. Now you're immediately heard by everyone."

The sheer number of bands that have featured Weiss is a perfect example of how she conceives musical scenes: "You kind of hung out with the same people in your town, you played music with the same people ... and you ended up crafting this thing, this scene."

Together, she and Malkmus have created the ultimate West Coast "superband" micro-cosm with the Jicks—a band that is "loose, and willing to do new things live," Weiss says.

In late 2006, Weiss became an official member of the Jicks. She began preparing to record an album with the group—a move that proved tricky, yet thrilling. "Musically, it's always challenging to play with new people and try to bring your own personality without corrupting too much what's already there," Weiss says. "It's mostly just fun to play with new people and to have a new perspective."

The transition from band to band has "been fine ... it wasn't too abrupt ... and I already knew these guys [The Jicks] so well," Weiss says, emphasizing again the importance of her bandmates. "I'm just happy to play with someone [Malkmus] who I have such respect for."

It is clear that her attitude leans toward teamwork and trust, rather than the rockstar-esque, ego-stoking heights of personal fame. "When I work with the same people, I get to know them and hunker down," she says. "You can push things—there's that trust and friendship." The freedom and creativity often associated with individual rockers is a team effort for the Jicks.

Self-effacing and down-to-earth, Weiss' own reaction to the album is: "I think it came out sounding like a record ... I'm really happy with it. I can listen to it, and it doesn't make me squirm." A reaction like this may seem surprising, considering the critical success of the Sleater-Kinney records, as well as the praise expected for the Jicks' newest creation. A major part of the album's appeal is its sense of intimacy. "It sounds like it sounded when we played it—you know, it's like four people playing together in a room," Weiss says. "That vibe carries through to the end product."

Real Emotional Trash hits the shelves on March 4, and a few weeks later on March 20, the Jicks begin their tour. Audiences can look forward to hearing new songs, but also new takes on old songs. "I think Steve gets bored when he plays the same songs over and over ...," Weiss says. "He'll just decide he wants to change the song. He'll make it up on the spot and it will be really good ... sometimes it's hard to even believe."



Stephen Malkmus (left) and the Jicks (l-r): Mike Clark, Janet Weiss, and Joanne Bolme



on lucy:
gown carlos maldonado
on meleine:
gown carlos maldonado

This Charming Man

welcome spring with an assortment
of bright ethnic prints, flower
appliqué, sheer details, and the best
luxury accessory of all—men

STYLED BY SHIRLEY CHEN
PHOTOS BY JOEY SHEMAUEL



on kim:
dress diane von
furstenberg

on meilaine:
dress 3.1 phillip lim

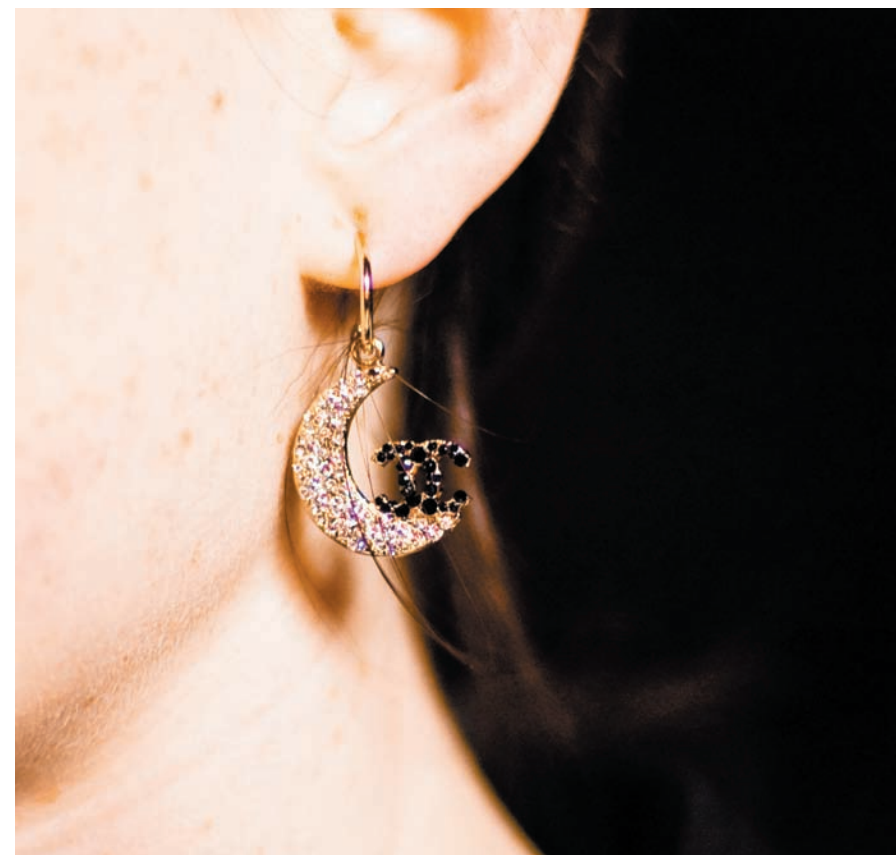
on lucy:
top 3.1 phillip lim



*This man
said it's
gruesome
that
someone so
handsome
should
care.*

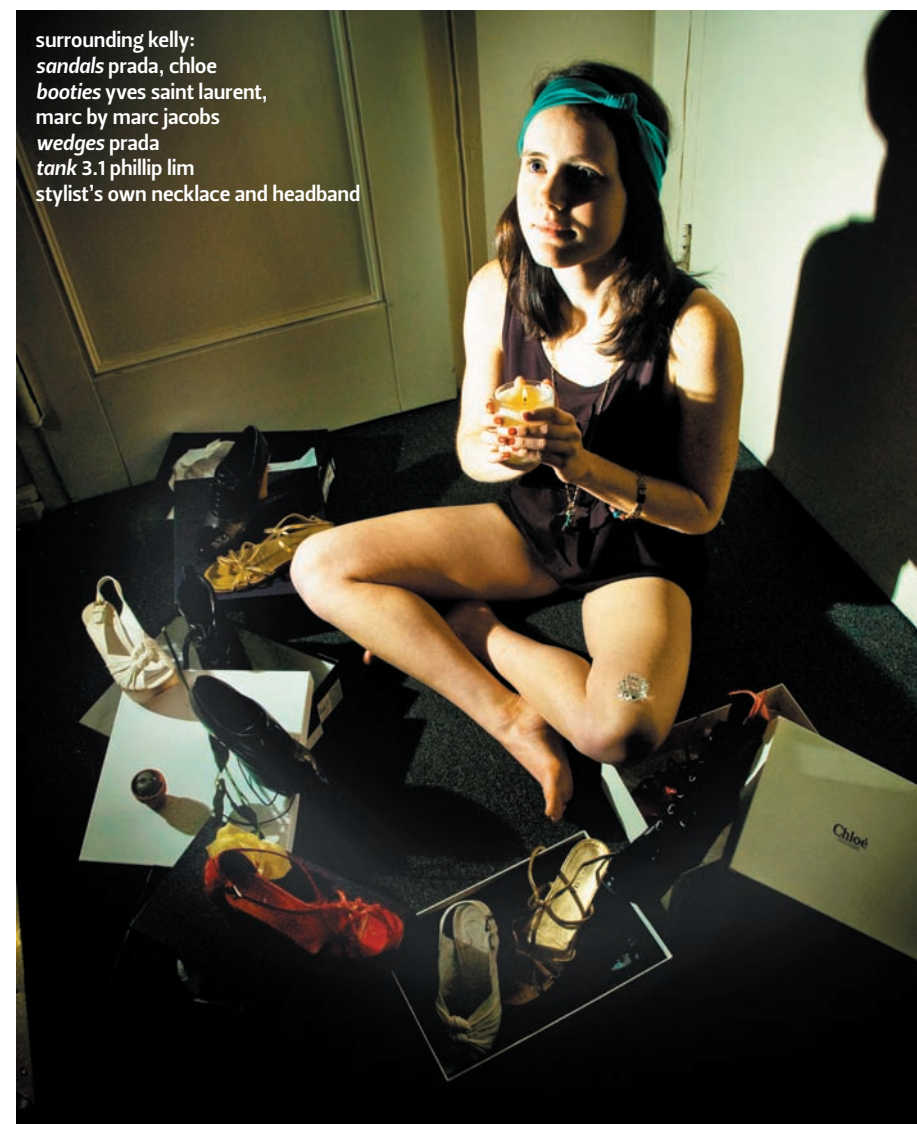
on gunnar:
vest dolce & gabbana

on kelly:
dress 3.1 phillip lim
bag chanel



earring chanel

*I would go out tonight, but I
haven't got a stitch to wear.*



surrounding kelly:
sandals prada, chloe
booties yves saint laurent,
marc by marc jacobs
wedges prada
tank 3.1 phillip lim
stylist's own necklace and headband



on meilaine:
dress diane von
furstenberg

on kim:
dress milly

on lucy:
dress 3.1 phillip lim

*Why pamper life's
complexity ...*



*... when
the leather
runs
smooth
on the
passenger
seat?*

Thank you to:
Kelly Knox, Gunnar Aasen, Meleine Martinez, Ilia
Shatashvili, Kim Tran, and Lucy Stowe

Special thanks to:
Lunar Gala Fashion Show and Nancy Chen

All lyrics are from "This Charming Man" by The Smiths

The Importance of Being Earnest

a texan director strives for sincerity

BY MARK KROTOV

PHOTO COURTESY OF WARNER INDEPENDENT PICTURES

BEFORE LAST WEEK, I was not the right writer to discuss David Gordon Green's career or *Snow Angels*, his new film. My critical distance from Green was about as great as my critical distance from a favorite novel, or from my mom. For seven-and-a-half years of my life, Green was more than a talented young filmmaker—he was a kindred spirit, though I had never met him. He had seen what I had seen and heard what I had heard, and—with far more grace and care than I could ever muster—shared his observations in *George Washington*, his remarkable debut.

I first saw *George Washington* at Atlanta's High Museum of Art in the summer of 2000. The film had been rejected from Sundance but had won the Southeastern Media Award at the Atlanta Film Festival, which led to the museum's high-profile screening. In the months and years that followed, the film screened at the New York and Toronto Film Festivals, landed on Roger Ebert's Top 10 list of the year, and was canonized by the Criterion Collection—one of very few 21st-century films to receive the designation.

But this roaring acclaim was all in the future when I saw *George Washington*, and it wouldn't have mattered to me anyway. Green's film, a languid, intimate portrait of a hot North Carolinian summer in a dying post-industrial town, seemed to capture the thing that I had most wanted captured on film—the south with which I was barely familiar, but whose poetic possibilities were unmistakable.

For the subsequent seven-and-a-half years, the film remained enthralling and flawless. I watched it many times, always struck by the warmth and genuineness of Green's amateur child actors and the luminous stasis of the cinematography. After seeing *Snow Angels*, however, I watched *George Washington* for probably the 10th time, and it was suddenly clear that the earlier film's conspicuous flaws were not merely a function of the script or the source material. Instead, I now saw that they had their genesis in a film that I had—up until now—considered beyond criticism.

For all of its hypnotic visuals, *George Washington* always seemed especially valuable for its humanity. Here was a film about children that was neither cute nor cloying, where kids were really kids. But after I took another look, the film no longer seemed unaffected. Indeed, I found myself struggling with much of the dialogue, which not only sounded a bit too clever, but also seemed to exist to be enjoyed with a kind of distanced amusement—"Look at these silly, smart kids talking about marriage and love." Green's sensitivity rescued the film from being actually patronizing, but the genuineness now seemed forced, if not contrived.

If *George Washington* featured moments that seemed awfully fortuitous, then *Snow Angels* is a catalog of convenient confrontations. Yet even as it falls prey to the clichés of overly depressing, American



Director David Gordon Green attempts to capture the complexity of human relationships in *Snow Angel*.

relationship dramas—an unfortunate but pervasive genre—it reveals a beautiful, sincere core that makes it compelling, even urgent. Adapted by Green from a novel by Stewart O'Nan, the film portrays three couples in various emotional states. Louise (Jeannette Arnette) and Don (Griffin Dunne) are dealing with a difficult separation as their son Arthur (the fabulous Michael Angarano, who played young William Miller in *Almost Famous*) begins to spend quality time with Lila (the equally radiant Olivia Thirlby). In the main story line, the deeply religious and deeply troubled (the film suggests that the two are essentially corroboratory) Glenn attempts to win back the affections of Annie (Kate Beckinsale), whose own life is far from successful. Their young daughter's life quickly becomes a metaphor for their familial struggle, with tragic and devastating results.

Though a disappointment, *Snow Angels* is by no means a failure. Even as Green restrains himself from the ambient, digressive images that gave his earlier films so much character, he expands the film's domestic focus with quick,

poignant glances at the town's quiet streets and vivid shots of the high school marching band. Ultimately, however, the film cannot overcome the contrivance

SNOW ANGELS IS LARGELY A DOCUMENT OF CLASHES, FIGHTS, AND GENERAL HYSTERIA.

that *George Washington* generally avoided because *Snow Angels* is largely a document of clashes, fights, and general hysteria. The film features some curious stylistic choices—like the brilliant cinematographer Tim Orr's sudden zooms—but the effect is distracting, rather than revealing. Green's relationship with his lead actors falls prey to the same mistakes of overcalculation. Green's incisive and empathetic direction is clearly an outgrowth of his facility with actors, and the performances in the film are multifaceted and subtle—an especially extraordinary feat for Rockwell and Beckinsale, mostly because each actor conveys

far more depth than could possibly be accounted for by the schematic, jolting narrative.

Snow Angels does possess a thread of earnestness and sincerity: the blossoming relationship between Arthur and Lila. Their scenes are filled with the awkward verbal half-steps and physical evasions that define all human interaction but which seem especially characteristic of young, teenage love. At the very least, it rang very true to this critic—still an adolescent in many ways.

After *George Washington*, Green seemed to have paid more attention to the elements that it took me years to notice, because his subsequent film, 2003's *All the Real Girls*, actually was pretty perfect. A deeply honest drama about two hesitant, inarticulate post-adolescents (played by Zooey Deschanel and Paul Schneider, who got his start in *George Washington*), the film was more plot-driven than Green's debut, but managed to retain its organic structure and cinematography. In other words, it would have provided a perfect template for *Snow Angels*.

In short, watching *Snow Angels* and revisiting *George Washington* ultimately led me to rediscover the greatness that is *All the Real Girls*. Undertow, released in 2004, is a worthy film as well, and it's Green's most self-conscious and stylized work, but his filmography thus far hints at an interest in cinematic honesty, suggesting that *George Washington*, *Real Girls*, and *Snow Angels* can be viewed on a continuum. The casts have bigger names than they once did, and Green has certainly expanded his focus, but in *All the Real Girls*, the director attained an extraordinary level of sincerity without sacrificing the gifts that still make *George Washington* stunning.

But Green is nothing if not dynamic—his next film, *Pineapple Express*, which will be released in August, is nothing less than a Judd Apatow stoner comedy. He is also only 32 years old, which suggests that the next seven-and-a-half years could provide me with much more fodder for reassessment. I'm looking forward to it.

Cultural Maodernity

chinese artists' heritage informs, but does not dictate, their art

BY ALLIE FISHER

PHOTO BY DAVID HEALD

COURTESY OF GUGGENHEIM FOUNDATION

THE MOST DISCONCERTING THING about stepping into Cai Guo-Qiang's new show at the Guggenheim is that the background noise in the museum sounds just the same as that in the small exhibit by Lin Yilin at the Shanghai Gallery of Art in China—and not because the exhibits have the same dusty quietude typical of art houses. In fact the atmosphere is far from hushed—both buildings welcome the visitor with gargled discord, a mess of audio from various TV speakers slightly under-qualified for the decibel range involved.

From there, however, the shows diverge dramatically. The Guggenheim's rotunda space greets visitors with a sequence of nine white sedans, suspended by uncannily thin wires and rotating in a seeming stop-motion capture of free-fall form. From the inside of each car radiates tube lighting, which flashes in mock explosion up the seven-story installation.

The Shanghai Gallery of Art presents a much darker and claustrophobic entrance. About 10 feet from the doorway is a high, white wall, lined with 10 14-inch TV screens. Each plays looping clips of the artist and various Norwegian students acting out responses to the questions, "What is your problem?" and "What is the problem with the world?"

The reason for even comparing these two artists—both Chinese originally but recent transplants to New York, both with a tendency toward the experimental—is to see if perhaps contemporary Chinese art is different, or presented differently, in China than it is in the U.S.

The fact that the initial audio in both of the openings gives similar impressions is not enough to prove that Chinese artists work in similar ways across geographical boundaries. Nor is the subsequent visual difference enough to say curators treat Chinese art differently across the Pacific. The discord is only an incidental overlay made after the works themselves, unintended by the artist yet a reality of the open floor plan in most museums and galleries. In the same way that these shows cannot be judged based on their first impressions, the two artists cannot be equated purely by their common denominator of Chineseness.

But by the same measure, each of these shows is in some way specifically shaped around cultural heritage. Cai Guo-Qiang's show, "I Want to Believe," marks the first exhibit of a Chinese artist at the Guggenheim, and is part of a larger effort to increase the museum's collection of non-Western contemporary art, one of the most popular "genres," so to speak, in the art world today.

A testament to the true interconnectedness of the global art community, Lin Yilin will be featured in New York's upcoming Asian Contemporary Art Week, which runs from March 18–24, and she will speak at the China Institute on 65th Street on March 18. The title of Lin Yilin's Shanghai show—"A Spatio-Temporal Tunnel"—is meant to evoke the artist's recent experience returning to China after an eight-year stint without a visit.

The balance of tipping a hat to tradition while firmly



The two artists cannot be equated purely by their common denominator of Chinese-ness.

trying to work freely of historical constraints seems to be a common theme of well-respected Chinese contemporary work. Most artists will work with elements emblematic of their country at first, simply because those are the subjects and materials available. Lin Yilin certainly did that with his early work, in which he constructed cement-block walls around trees, foot massagers, and even himself.

The pieces usually commented pretty directly on the influence of a Westernized world (often represented by Hong Kong) bringing unwanted changes into his home province of Guangzhou. In his most famous public installation—if you can call it that—Yilin moved a section of a wall brick-by-brick across the main thoroughfare running between Hong Kong and Guangzhou. No hidden meaning there—by blocking traffic he meant to protest the influx of Westernization across the border.

But walls were entirely absent from Yilin's Shanghai Gallery show. This was more mature work, more cerebral, and—as suggested by his inclusion of Norwegian students in the piece mentioned earlier—certainly more culturally ambiguous. Shanghai Gallery of Art director David Chan explains that this complexity is exactly what he wanted.

"I'm more concerned with the formal idea of what an artist brings forth [from the work]," Chan says. He expresses his frustration with much of the Chinese art remaining at surface level, work he feels is simply cashing in on the recent cache of Chinese art in the West, but lacks any deeper questioning. "Artists can make a living selling art now. That changes it," he says.

By labeling themselves as "Chinese," artists can be-

come a part of the new cash cow that is "Chinese contemporary art." Rising artists, especially in cities like New York, can earn large sums for relatively one-dimensional work. In an auction at Christie's one year ago, the day closed with a total of \$20.1 million in sales—just in Chinese art. It was the highest recorded intake from a Chinese-art sale in New York to that point.

What frustrates Chan most is the mold these artists fall—one into which the art world forces them, but of which they also choose to be a part. "The articulation of Chineseness is very superficial. People always narrate the cultural origin [of an artist], but humanity is defined by an innate response to something extreme."

Perhaps this grasp at humanity is Cai Guo-Qiang's main goal—a man working in gunpowder, arrows, and atom-bomb imagery must deeply understand the core elements of a human reaction to violence. (When asked his opinion of Cai's work, Chan pauses, smiles slightly and says, "Well, he's a very good showman.")

The artist himself explains that his work presents a "psychological contradiction for people, drawn from psychological uneasiness." He challenges viewers with exploding cars and tigers shot through with arrows, forcing them to come to grips with the violence but also the "tragic beauty" underlying each disaster: "I am bringing chaos to time, to context, and to culture ... I ignore the boundaries between Chinese, Eastern, and Western, or whatever culture there is."

Violence—and more specifically in a modern context, terrorism—crosses boundaries without discrimination. But Cai explains that his work more particularly aims to draw out a "child's curiosity, or doubting attitude towards life experiences." Cai's coupling of violence and beauty provokes a childlike disbelief and a very adult appreciation. One Guggenheim visitor says, "It's so elemental, so unexpected. It takes everything you ever thought about art and breaks right through it."

Chan points out that this is the goal of a lot of Chinese art today. "In China, art has a relevance to what's going on." He emphasizes that in a communist society, Chinese artists are increasingly taking the sometimes dangerous and always controversial path of articulating their own individuality. "It is a struggle between

the individual and the collective," Chan says.

Both Cai and Lin take the underlying messages of their work seriously, but in their more mature work neither directs these lessons to a particular audience. Their ideas find global application and appreciation because they reach further to the core of "humanity," whatever that may be. Still, Chan maintains that the current framing of their art as Chinese before anything else denies each artist his ultimate goal.

"These two artists are positioned as 'Chinese,' but they have both left China and return to it with a shifted perspective," Chan says. "They find themselves somewhere in between the two places, and as a result are able to see everything differently—from that removed perspective—but people still see them as only Chinese artists. Artists are artists. There should be more hybridity."

She's Movin' Out

lauren pritchard bows on broadway in favor of solo pursuits

BY DAN BLANK

PHOTO COURTESY OF RON SHAPIRO MANAGEMENT

A YOUNG GIRL from a small town in Tennessee travels to California and then to New York, finding success on Broadway but dreaming of a musical solo career—this certainly sounds like a conceivable backstory for the bohemian character of Ilse in Broadway's hit musical *Spring Awakening*. But, in fact, it is Lauren Pritchard, the actress who portrays Ilse, who recently left the show to embark upon a solo career as a recording artist.

Pritchard is certainly no stranger to performance. She began participating in community theater because her cousin was involved and has been acting in shows since she was seven.

Her first show was *Jack and the Beanstalk*, in which playing the lead role required her to wear a little boy's wig. "By the time I was 11 or 12, I had spent my life in dance classes, singing and doing plays," Pritchard says. "I made a personal decision at that age that that was the only thing I wanted to do with my life."

Growing up in what she describes as a "Bible-belt, sheltered, all-Baptist community" in Tennessee, Pritchard's available repertoire of musical theater hardly strayed from the ordinary. Before coming to New York, her resume included such standard classics as *Annie*, *The Sound of Music*, *The Music Man*, and *The Wizard of Oz*. But anyone who's heard anything at all about *Spring Awakening*—a boundary-pushing musical that covers just about every taboo from homosexuality to teen suicide—knows that the 2007 Tony Award Winner for Best Musical is a far cry from any standard musical theater.

When asked if any of her roles before *Spring Awakening* had been particularly good preparation for her turn as Ilse, Pritchard recounts portraying the blind and deaf Helen Keller in *The Miracle Worker* when she was nine years old. "It flipped me out completely," she says, "but it was in that moment that I think I realized I really wanted to pursue this kind of in-depth love of what I'm doing. ... I had to learn sign language and it became fun for me. It was an in-depth way to play a character. That helped me when I had to do *Spring Awakening* and learn to get in touch with a piece itself and the character I was playing."

Pritchard's ability to take on different personas is not just limited to the stage. Before moving to New York, Pritchard found herself playing keyboard and singing backup vocals in a reggae band in California, a gig that she was forced to give up to join the cast of *Spring Awakening*.

Leaving the band was "a really tough decision," she says, though she decided that she had to go none-

theless. "Some kind of higher power was telling me, 'This band is not the thing for you, or else it would be working out. You need to go and do this show.'" Despite nerves and a second cross-country move in as many years, Pritchard made the jump. "I was definitely freaked out," she says. As it turned out, though, Pritchard's memorable role as Ilse in the award-showered show earned her tremendous praise. And, perhaps with some guidance from that same higher power, her Broadway debut brought her onto the radar of the people most valuable to aspiring singer-songwriters. After a series of promising meetings with industry insiders, Pritchard signed with Sony BMC, essentially taking the first steps toward a primarily music-oriented stage of her life. Working closely with manager Ron Shapiro and *Spring Awakening* composer Duncan Sheik, Pritchard is well on her way towards making an album that fulfills her goals.

"I want to make great music, and I want to have a big hand in it," she recalls telling one of the producers from Sony BMG.

Ironically, although her voice is one of the most memorable parts of the show, Pritchard herself can't stand it. "I can't really stand to hear myself sing," she says.

The passion to move from Broadway into a career as a solo artist is not a recent one. She draws inspiration from a number of artists, particularly Billy Joel, whom she considers to be "the greatest thing since sliced bread," and performing as a solo artist has been an aspiration for several years. By the time she was 16, Pritchard had already realized that she "wanted to be a singer-songwriter more than anything else, even if it took a long time."

But at the age of 19, it hasn't taken her all that long to succeed. With a notable Broadway role already under her belt, Pritchard has accomplished more before her 20th birthday than many aspiring performers do in a lifetime.

The jump she's about to make, however, isn't an easy one. Without set show times or an entire cast



After finishing a successful run as Ilse in Broadway's 2007 blockbuster, *Spring Awakening*, 19-year-old Pritchard is now itching to add a solo album to her list of achievements.

supporting her, Pritchard fully realizes that a solo career will be a challenge compared to musicals. "I think it's going to be just as hard and just as grueling, if not maybe more, simply because it's just me," says Pritchard. "I'm now the biggest part and the only part." Everything depends on her, and, as a result, predicting when the first album will be out is no easy task.

"Sometime after Halloween, hopefully we'll be on our way to putting something out. Could be longer, could be shorter, depends on the recording of the actual thing. I wish I could give a definite answer. It won't be in, like, four years," she says.

While Pritchard spends her time in the recording studio, she plans to put Broadway on the back burner. "I think eventually it will be something I come back to—because I do love it—but hopefully not for a long time, until I feel like maybe I've fulfilled all of these singer-songwriter musical dreams."

PRITCHARD HAS ACCOMPLISHED MORE BEFORE HER 20TH BIRTHDAY THAN MANY ASPIRING PERFORMERS DO IN A LIFETIME.



Nightmare on Sesame Street

BY AKIVA BAMBERGER

MONSTERS. IN MY EXPERIENCE, they are baby-snatchers, murderers, and frightening beings. Recently, I realized that *Sesame Street* made light of such a serious thing as monsters. At first, I was in disbelief. I had always thought that the furry, unidentifiable creatures on the show were merely animals of a phylum of which I had never heard. Not monsters. Monsters enjoy punching puppies in the face.

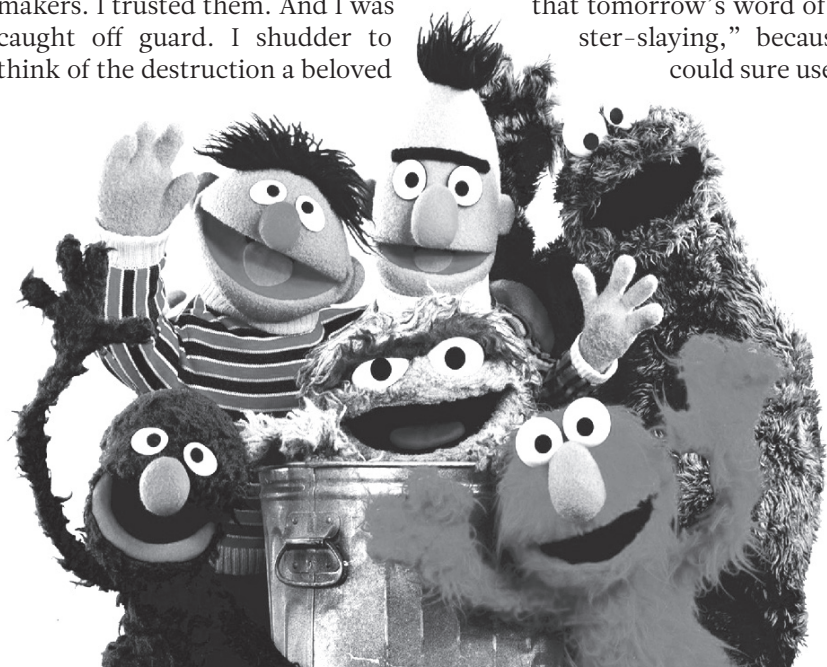
But the truth hit hard one Thursday afternoon, when I noticed that the characters on my beloved *Sesame Street* were reminiscent of the monsters I often battled in my dreams. Elmo. Oscar the Grouch. Also Cookie Monster. In fact, Monster was Cookie's last name.

PBS taught me to love these mischief-makers. I trusted them. And I was caught off guard. I shudder to think of the destruction a beloved

character like Cookie Monster would wreak if his supply of confections ever ran out.

Hitler was a monster. So is Elmo. I don't understand why a TV show would ever want me to sympathize with either. On *Sesame Street*, I was only shown the side of Elmo that lived in Elmo's World, a crayon-drawn utopia where he played with a little goldfish named Dorothy. What of Elmo's monstrous side, the side that ate souls and sucked happiness out of children, the side that leapt out of closets and disemboweled the elderly?

I feel sick to my stomach from the thought that I stood by passively as my favorite TV show supported some of the most horrific creatures this world has ever seen. Shame on PBS. Shame on my parents. I only hope that tomorrow's word of the day is "monster-slaying," because *Sesame Street* could sure use some. \\\



You can tell they're sociopaths because they're not blinking.

ENGLISH LESSON.

PHRASE: "To be in the habit of"
EXAMPLE: "I am in the habit of Sister Maria."



The Funny Bone

BY RAPHAEL POPE-SUSSMAN

A Joke

Q. What do you call the progeny of a king who is made of glass?

A. The heir transparent.

Trendspotting Countdown

What are we seeing on hinges this week?

- ➊ mail slots
- ➋ partially decapitated heads
- ➌ doors

In the News

- John McCain Energy Policy: American Runs on Dunkin'.
- Poll: 57 percent of Americans believe "Obama" rhymes with "Yo Mama."

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The (Columbia) Sartorialist

elle white and ehizoje azeke

TEXT AND PHOTOS BY ALEX GREER

Ehizoje Azeke, CC '08

➔ There's no such thing as too many layers. I'm still surprised at how well he combined all the different palettes—grays, reds and beige seamlessly melt together in his outfit. The cut on everything is flawless too—the jacket shows just enough of his sweater cuffs, the sweater stops right below his belt, and the vest just barely touches the top of his pants. And the choice to tuck his jeans into his boots is certainly bold, but he easily pulls it off, and in combination with the hat and the vest, he reminds me of a Hollywood director from the '40s.



Elle White, CC '10

⬅ Winter means heavy coats, so outerwear tends to dominate the outfits this time of year. For her it's no different—it's clearly the jacket that makes this ensemble, which is what initially made me stop her. But then I noticed how well she managed to combine the sailor-esque colors of her duffle coat with the more natural earth tones seen in her scarf, shirt, and shoes. And the fact that her boots and bag match put a nice ribbon on the whole package.



SPLURGE OR STEAL: BOOTIES

BY MOIRA LYNCH

Booties have been trendy for the past several seasons, and judging from the spring runways, they will be around at least one season more in a new incarnation. Open-toe booties were common at many shows, including Gucci, Chanel, Chloe, and Dolce & Gabbana. Paired with everything from long dresses to short shorts, booties are a great way to update your spring look. They transition well from day to night, as they tread a fine line between casual and dressy, and stars like the Olsen sisters, Sienna Miller, and Kate Moss—who are often seen in booties—are sure to throw their slight weights behind the newest versions once the weather starts getting warmer.

SPLURGES



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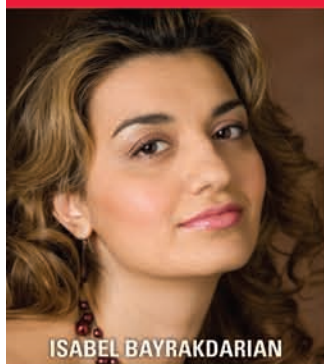
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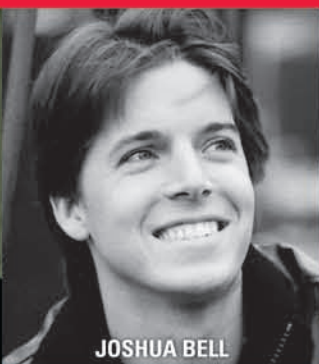
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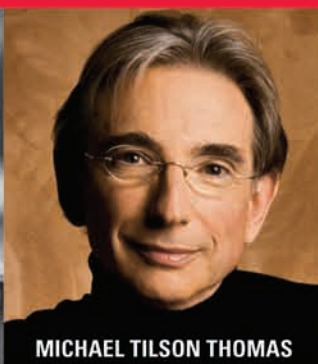
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